

The Dispatch

Newsletter of the

Capital District Civil War Round Table

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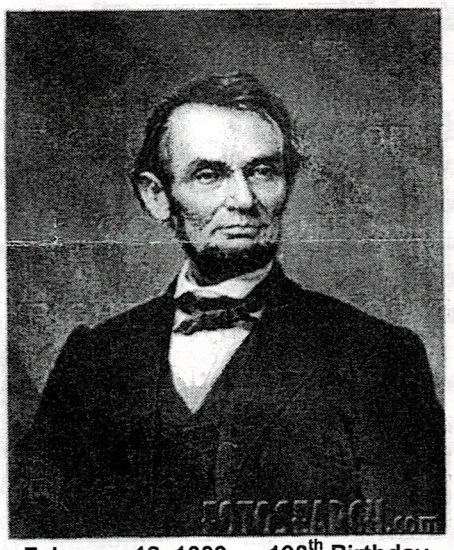

February 12, 1809 198th Birthday

Liberty and Union - Preserving Saratoga's Military History

Join us on February 9th as Christopher Morton, Assistant Curator at the NYS Military Museum and curator for the NYS Battle Flag Preservation Project, presents his latest research and a sneak preview on exciting news about a local Saratoga regiment, the 77th NYS Volunteers.

Chris will present a brief history on the 77th NYSVI, and discuss the inspiration of our Revolutionary War heritage and action at Bemis Heights as the basis for the unit designation and their battle flag. In his presentation, he will describe the Revolutionary War iconography on the flag and highlight one of the most interesting flags in the collection.

Chris will have images of the flag's conservation, with before and after pictures of the work being performed. This gives CDCWRT members a sneak preview of the work before the official unveiling in June 2007.

The current project, "Liberty & Union," is in cooperation between the Museum and two local schools. Students will be curating the exhibit, and documenting the conservation of the flag by creating a video of the work in progress. Additionally, they plan to develop a local Saratoga Springs walking tour of 77th NYSVI related sites in the city.

FEBRUARY MEETING
Friday February 9, 2007
Guilderland Library
2228 Western Ave.

GENERAL MEETING

SOCIAL HOUR	**6:00PM**
BUSINESS	**7:00PM**
PRESENTATION	**7:30PM**
DISCUSSION	**8:30PM**

CDCWRT MEETING

The February meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Guilderland Library on Friday, February 9, 2007. Please refer to the insert sheet for the topic and speaker.

JANUARY MEETING

At the January meeting, the membership elected the Board-proposed slate. The new Board is listed on the last page of the newsletter. Retiring president, Matt George, was honored for his leadership and educational activities the past two years. He was presented with a sculpture of Gen. Grant by artist and RT member, Ron Tunison. An audience of 68 listened to Laura Alpert's excellent presentation about Dr. Mary Walker, and Stacy Kilts' fascinating presentation on becoming a Gettysburg guide. There were many questions for both speakers. This was followed by good food and better camaraderie. Over $200 was raised for preservation by the sale of books and autographed commemorative cachets.

BOARD MEETING

At the January meeting, the new Board met under the leadership of the new president, J.J. Jennings. The treasurer's report noted $1925.90 in the regular account, and $9506.17 in the preservation account. Sales were $865 at the Troy Victorian Stroll, $269 at Saratoga First Night, and $245 at Rosemary's party so far. Overall monies raised for 2006 were less than 2005. This is probably related to poor weather conditions at the Irish Fest, Peterboro Civil War Days, and the Albany Rural Cemetery Civil War Days.

The Board also decided to not try to sponsor a spring trip this year. A fall trip will be offered on Columbus Day weekend, October 5-8, 2007, to Gettysburg, with Stacy Kilts as our personal tour guide. Details will follow in later newsletters.

UP-COMING EVENTS

February 17-18, Saturday and Sunday, are the dates for the annual Covermania at the Quality Inn, at exit 5 of I-90. This is a large show for stamp collectors, cachet collectors, postcard collectors, and collectors of other ephemera including Civil War letters. The show is **free**, and we encourage our membership to stop by. It's a great way to spend a cold February weekend. The RT always has an information table at the show. Volunteers are needed to spend a few hours meeting with the public. It's a great way to just talk about your passion with interested people. See JJ Jennings for details.

February 23-24, Friday and Saturday, are the dates for the Underground Railroad History Conference at the College of St. Rose in Albany.

March 9, Friday, is the regular monthly meeting of the CDCWRT at the Guilderland Library. The guest speaker will be Thomas Carroll of the Hudson-Mohawk Industrial Gateway and the

Burden Ironworks Museum. Tom will talk about the Monitor on the 145th Anniversary of the famous Battle of Hampton Roads.

MISCELLANEOUS

Your editor, while on vacation at Hilton Head, brought along a book entitled, ***Where Death and Glory Meet,*** by Russell Duncan. The small book is about Col. Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. This was more than coincidence. I grabbed then book 'randomly' from my bookcase. As we drove from Charleston to Hilton Head, I heard on the radio of Black History Month events in the region. I discovered that the 54th landed at Hilton Head after the regiment sailed from Boston. It then moved up-river to Beaufort, the very areas we were touring. The book is based almost exclusively on Shaw's letters home. Duncan explores the mind of a young man coming of age and posing philosophical thoughts about war, honor, his own racism and its transformation after he finally accepted command of the 54th. I would like to share some quotes from the book.

Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts was an abolitionist strongly advocated using blacks in the military. Francis and Sarah Show, Robert's parents, were also strong abolitionists, and joyfully read the governor's letter explaining his choice of their son to head the country's first regiment of Northern black soldiers. Shaw pondered and fretted over the "great honor" and wrote out his refusal.

He had joined the army to preserve the Union, and took no notice of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He supported the use of blacks as soldiers, but felt loyalty to his comrades in the 2nd Mass. He had seen the elephant at Cedar Mountain and Antietam, and had minor wounds. Shaw told his father, "I would take it, if I thought myself equal to the responsibility of such a position." Two days later he changed his mind. The philosopher William James hailed Shaw's courage to throw himself into "this new negro-soldier venture where loneliness was certain, ridicule inevitable, failure possible; and Shaw was only twenty-five."

Gen. Strong held out "opportunity." He asked Shaw if he wanted the 54th to lead the charge on Fort Wagner. Shaw knew the key to Charleston lay at the end of the beach. If black men could storm the fort and open the door to the birthplace of the rebellion, the symbolism would be enormous. His duty was never clearer. The chance for the sons of slaves to show that they would fight and thus to vindicate those who supported them, suddenly reached out its hand to Shaw. Shaw felt the destiny of a race upon his shoulders….They (the men of the 54th) always remembered the "little colonel" who sacrificed his life for a promise of better lives for black people. When the Shaw family heard that Robert was buried with his men, they wrote that they could hope for "no holier place" for Shaw's body. The propaganda effect of Wagner was enormous. Few acts have been more right for memorial than Shaw's death and burial at Wagner.

Fortunate in birth and in war, Shaw grew stronger and developed a richer personal character after he accepted an unwanted position at the head of a black regiment and struggled with his own preconceptions of black inferiority. What Shaw had was courage and loyalty. The men of the 54th lifted him to a higher plane and educated him even as their efforts caused others to reexamine their own prejudices.